

## **RISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL**

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

March 2, 2026

Virtual Meeting

Narrative Mission Statement: What is the purpose of the school? "...The Rising Tide Charter School provides students with community-based education each day, using the Town of Plymouth as a local yet dynamic textbook which will provide fertile ground for the development of higher-order thinking skills."

Leadership and Governance: "In accordance with MA Charter School Law, the Board of Trustees is ultimately accountable for the school's educational mission, performance and adherence to its Charter."

**This meeting was originally scheduled for February 23rd, but rescheduled for March 2 due to the impacts of the Blizzard.**

**Call to Order:** Laura called the meeting to order at 7:04pm. In attendance were: Laura Stearns Flynn, Chris Talamo, John Polvere, Erin Koh, Tess Goldmann, Sean Kelly, Jane Moskowitz, and Amy Norris. Also in attendance were Michael O'Keefe, Zahra Williams, Eric Mello. Ralph Andre was absent

**Introduction/Welcome to guests:** The Board welcomed Pam Leary, Mathematics Teacher and Mathematics & Computer Science Department Chair, Leane McCullough, Science Teacher and Science Department Chair, Josh Whelan, Latin Teacher and World Languages Department Chair, and students: Arianne Medina, William Driscoll and Noah McGrail.

**Review and approval of Meeting Minutes:** Eric remarked that the cost for the van was misquoted and should be on record at \$60,300 not \$38,000. Amy made a motion to accept the minutes with the change to the cost of the van. John seconded the motion and the vote to accept the minutes was approved unanimously.

**Public Comment:** No public comment.

**School Report: Enrollment Lottery Update:** Michael O'Keefe, Head of School, reported that the enrollment lottery was rescheduled twice and ultimately held Monday morning, March 2 at 10:00 a.m. The lottery resulted in a full incoming class of 5th graders. A total of 338 applications were received across all grades, a decrease from 392 applications in the previous year. The two primary entry points, 5th and 9th grades, remained strong or improved, with 142 applicants for 5th grade (an increase of 10 over last year) and 40 applicants for 9th grade, consistent with the prior year. The most notable decline occurred in 6th grade, with 52 applicants compared to 91 last year, possibly reflecting increased awareness of the difficulty of entry at that grade level. Overall, the lottery was considered successful, and notifications were sent to all families regarding acceptance or waitlist status.

**Department Chair Updates:** Pam Leary, Mathematics and Computer Science Department Chair, reported on a team of eight faculty members, evenly split between middle school and high school. At the high school level, courses are often shared among teachers, with common materials and assessments to ensure consistency in student experience. In the middle school, each grade level has a dedicated math teacher. The math and science departments are collaborating on a STEM Night event, scheduled around Pi Day, beginning at 6:28 p.m. (representing  $2\pi$ ). This year's theme is forensics and crime scene investigation, with a variety of related student activities planned.

Leanne McCullough, Science Department Chair, reported that high school courses are frequently co-taught or aligned across teachers, with shared assessments, coursework, and laboratory experiences to ensure equity in instruction. Based on MCAS results, the department has identified a need to strengthen student performance in physical science and is working toward improved outcomes next fall. Instructional alignment includes shared teaching responsibilities across key subject areas, including physics, chemistry, and biology. Ms. McCullough also described the wide range of interactive activities planned for the upcoming STEM Night, including DNA extraction from strawberries, secret message decoding, fingerprinting, fiber analysis, chemical identification, cryptography, bullet trajectory analysis, animal tracking, and bone structure identification. Leanne hoped to have flyers to send to the newly accepted students. Families are encouraged to contribute pies for the event. In response to a question from Laura regarding whether families express concerns about shared coursework versus weighted distinctions, Ms. Leary noted that teachers collaborate closely and support one another to maintain strong and consistent instruction. When asked how the Board might support the department, she emphasized the strength of the team-based approach currently in place.

Josh Whelan, World Languages Department Chair, described the department as small but mighty, with six teachers across Latin and Spanish. Students in middle school study both languages and may choose one to pursue for three consecutive years in high school, with opportunities to advance to levels 4–5. The department offers Advanced Latin and dual enrollment in Spanish through a partnership with Southern New Hampshire University, allowing students to earn college credit. Efforts are underway to expand dual enrollment opportunities to Latin as well. Mr. Whelan shared plans for World Language Week in the spring, which will celebrate a broad range of languages spoken within the community. Activities may include a school-wide flag identification challenge, international music during arrival, and student-led recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in different languages. The department also promotes the Seal of Biliteracy program, which recognizes students who demonstrate proficiency in two or more languages. Participation has grown steadily, from one student in 2024 (who qualified in two languages) to four students last year, and seven seniors this year. The department continues working to identify appropriate assessments to support student qualification. Information about the program will be shared with families via ParentSquare. Laura asked what the Board could do to support the language department; Mr. Whelan emphasized broader concerns about the decline of world language programs in other schools and advocated for continued prioritization of language and arts education as essential components of the Rising Tide curriculum.

**Highlighting Student Achievement** – Zahra Williams introduced Arianne Medina, a senior selected to participate in the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), a program that promotes student engagement in civics and community leadership. Arianne is one of two students selected from Massachusetts and will travel to Washington, D.C. for a week beginning March 7, where she will attend meetings, interact with government officials, and deepen her understanding of the federal government. In addition to this opportunity, she has been awarded a scholarship to support her undergraduate studies. Arianne was also recognized at the DESE headquarters for her selection and will be featured in an interview with WCVB Channel 5. William Driscoll and Noah McGrail were recognized for earning third place in the Congressional App Challenge. The students developed an app called “School Tracker,” designed to improve communication and organization within the school community. The app, similar in concept to Google Classroom, allows students to track assignments, including those that may have been missed, with teacher approval, and fosters more open communication among students. The project took several months to complete, with data storage identified as a key challenge. Their work was recognized by staff members from Congressman Bill Keating’s office. Laura thanked and dismissed the students and Department Chairs following their presentations.

**New Business School Calendar Adjustments Due to Blizzard Cancellations – Board Vote -** Michael reported that there have been seven school cancellations since January 26, 2026. He reminded the Board that student learning time requirements are regulated by the state, including both the number of school days and instructional hours, as well as what qualifies as structured learning time. Updated guidance from Russell Johnston, issued in the previous school year, reiterates that all districts must maintain a 180-day school calendar, including five scheduled make-up days. Because cancellations have exceeded the five allotted make-up days prior to March 31, the current calendar would require extending the school year, with the last day falling on Monday, June 29. To avoid extending the school year further into late June, Michael proposed converting two previously scheduled non-school days into instructional days. Sean asked how busing would be handled. Michael explained that the school can operate on a slightly different schedule from neighboring districts as long as it remains reasonably aligned, and confirmed that transportation services would be available. Chris raised the question of potential pushback from families regarding the change to make Friday, April 3rd, Good Friday into a half day. Tess asked about historical attendance data for that day; however, such data is not available, noting that the only year the school was in session on Good Friday was during the transition to 59 Armstrong Road in the 2017-2018 school year. Board members generally agreed that making up days in the spring is preferable to extending the school year further into June. Sean made a motion to approve the proposed calendar adjustments for March 11 and April 3. Tess seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Update from Head of School Search Committee and Planning for In-Person Final Stage** Chris provided an update on the Head of School search process. He reported that the committee received 63 applications, which have been narrowed down to nine candidates who have completed panel interviews. The goal is to identify a finalist by the next Board meeting in order to begin the transition process. Chris outlined the anticipated next phase, which would involve bringing final candidates to the school for a half-day, in-person visit. During this visit, candidates would meet with teachers, Board members, students, and Eric Mello. At this stage,

candidate identities would become public. Chris then raised the question of the Board's level of involvement in the final stages of the process and presented three possible options with varying levels of involvement with the Board. Laura clarified that the intent of the discussion is to gauge Board interest and availability for participation, noting that the Board will ultimately be responsible for the final vote. Sean commented that meeting candidates in person would either require a broader time commitment from Board members or raise concerns about bias if only some members participate. Amy suggested that discussions could take place in executive session, though any formal meeting would still need to comply with public meeting requirements. Tess asked about the anticipated timeline for scheduling, and Chris responded that the goal is to complete the final round by March 27. Eric asked whether it would be possible to schedule multiple candidates on the same day. Chris expressed concern about candidates potentially crossing paths. Michael added that it would be logistically challenging to host more than one candidate at a time due to space constraints and the need to coordinate meetings with multiple stakeholder groups. Laura suggested that, following the Search Committee's upcoming meeting, Board members would be contacted via email to confirm their availability and level of participation.

**Financial Matters - Review of January 2026 Financials – Board Vote** - Eric Mello presented the January 2026 financials. He reported that total enrollment stands at 589 students, with 364 in the middle school and 225 in the upper school. The school is projecting an end-of-year enrollment of 595 students, compared to the original budget projection of 610, later revised to 605. As a result of this under-enrollment, revenue is currently below budget. Despite this, expenses are offset by approximately \$130,000 in savings, resulting in a positive year-to-date balance. Eric noted that while there have been significant snow removal costs, the school is still in a position to potentially break even by year's end due to these offsetting savings. He further reported that the school remains strong in terms of cash flow. There is also the possibility of additional revenue if the per-pupil rate comes in higher than projected. Overall, the school remains in a stable financial position and is aiming to meet its budget targets by the end of the fiscal year. Chris made a motion to approve the January financials, and John seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Board Subcommittee reports** - There were no subcommittee meetings.

**Other business not anticipated by the chair 24 hours in advance of the meeting** - none

Sean made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Chris seconded. The vote to adjourn the meeting was unanimous.